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Deal closer in Riverfront cleanup

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By Heidi Desch The Western News |

The Libby City Council and Environmental Protection Agency officials seem closer to a cleanup plan for Riverfront Park.

At a meeting Tuesday, the mayor and council said they would have a design plan ready for the site in April. The EPA recently sent a letter to the city stating it had until March 14 to grant access to cleanup the site.

Rebecca Thomas, EPA project manager, said the EPA needs to know the city is close to a design plan so that the agency can move forward.

“Our interest is in reducing exposure (to asbestos),” she said.

The park is the former export plant site in Libby. Discussions began last year about cleanup and eventual expansion of the park, which sits south of the Kootenai River.

The city and EPA have since been trying to work out a deal that would allow the EPA to remove vermiculite from the site and the city to develop the park since last fall.

The city recently began working with an engineer to finalize plans for the park. Changes include moving the location of the access road to the park and adding a parking lot.

Thomas said the EPA would like to begin work on the site.

“We need direction from the city,” she said. “Give us some direction on the plan.”

The EPA has outlined two options for cleanup.

The first choice calls for the EPA using a combination of cut and fill to leave a minimum of 18 inches of clean fill, or the equivalent, such as 12 inches and a cement sidewalk. The agency would perform remediation work that would correspond with the city's future plans for the site as a park, such as laying gravel for roadways, cleaning out a utility corridor and hydroseeding planned grassy areas.

The second option entails that the EPA perform enough cut and fill to break the exposure pathway, and then allow the city to carry out its own restoration using funds that the EPA saved by not performing the work.

Mayor Doug Roll agreed that it was time to finalize the project.

"You're waiting for us. We're waiting for you," he said. "And everybody is standing here waiting. Somebody has to take the first step."

That first step came in the form of an extension.

The city will draft a letter to the EPA asking for an extension on the deadline to get an engineering plan in place. The council also agreed to create a contract that would allow the city to carry out its own restoration costs.

The city is also requesting an increase on the amount the EPA will pay the city for an engineer. The EPA has agreed to pay \$15,000 for engineering on the site, but the city expects the cost to be closer to \$27,000.

"Consider lifting or raising those engineering fees," councilmember Bill Bichoff said. "We're struggling to come up with that money and that would help us move along."

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